

Ukraine's European Integration: Post-election Prospects

The presidential elections in April and parliamentary elections in July, respectively, placed in power a new president and substantially new Parliament, mainly lacking in previous political experience. There are still too many unknowns for future domestic and foreign policy, and one of the key issues experts and foreign diplomats would like to be clear about it this: will Ukraine's policy on European integration remain unchanged.

Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" analyzed foreign policy programs and plans of President Zelenskyy and political parties present in the new Parliament.

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The way Volodymyr Zelenskyy designed his election platform did not allow to clearly identify his position on European integration or mostly the other foreign-policy objectives for the new Administration. The purpose of those tactics was to focus attention on the domestic agenda, attracting wider electorate, those unhappy with the performance of the previous team.

Absence of experienced foreign policy advisor in Zelenskyy's team during the presidential campaign, while Zelenskyy himself had very limited knowledge of international relations may have signalled that foreign policy was not among his priorities. This was one of the reasons why he avoided public appearances at international platforms as a candidate during the first round, causing concern amongst international experts and diplomats and pushing them to seek informal channels of communication.

Still during the campaign, while asked on strategic steps in foreign policy, Zelenskyy had proposed putting the issues of Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO on a referendum.

After his victory, the newly-elected President took some time to offer a more or less coherent vision of his foreign policy priorities. In his inauguration speech that can be seen as a programmatic

address of sorts, President Zelenskyy continued this vague positioning, only mentioning Ukraine's European pace and NATO standards for the military.

Further shaping up of the foreign policy team at the President's Office and his first foreign visits gave more food for thoughts. Working visit to Brussels on June 4-5, 2019 offered some specifics, while meeting with the President of the European Council, President of the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, where he emphasized the invariability of Ukraine's strategic course towards the EU and NATO membership as stated in the Constitution of Ukraine. President Zelenskyy also noted the necessity of increasing international pressure on Russia through sanctions.

Clearer priorities emerged from the Joint Statement following the 21st EU-Ukraine summit on July 8, 2019. President Zelenskyy signed the document on behalf of Ukraine. This can be interpreted as his readiness to proactively implement the Association Agreement, including the following aspects:

- Cooperation with the EU in countering hybrid threats, including through strategic communications;
- The need to reinstate criminal responsibility for illicit enrichment and ensure effective work of all anti-corruption institutions;

- Completion of the gas and electricity market reform, including finalization of unbundling for sustainable integration with the EU Energy Market;
- Further harmonization of Ukraine's legislation on digital economy with that of the EU; and
- Legislative work and practical implementation of the respective legislation by Ukrainian institutions to launch negotiations on the Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Goods (ACAA).

Ukraine's European Integration in Platforms of Political Parties

Given the early election to the Verkhovna Rada in July 2019, most experts realized that election programs of the political parties would have limited impact. Party conventions were rushed up and platforms were compiled as a nominal element of the application package for the Central Election Commission. Analysis demonstrated that most of the political parties that cleared a threshold to work in the new Parliament had issues of the European integration of Ukraine in their platforms but available details of their positions vary.

The political platform of the elections leader, political party Sluha narodu (Servant of the People, party of the President Zelenskyy), is a compilation of highlights that offer little information for analysis. In the context of relations with the EU, Servant of the People declares its intention to pass laws that are necessary for the implementation of the Association Agreement and expansion of cooperation with the EU in other spheres. In terms of reforms in Ukraine, the party plans to conduct decentralization in line with the EU norms that implies delegation of powers to executive committees of local councils. State administrations will be transformed into European-type prefectures.

The European Solidarity political party (a party of the previous President Poroshenko) has as a slogan of its election platform - "Let's protect the European future!". The main idea of its platform is that progress on European integration can be lost due to revanchist ideas in Ukraine. The party sees

its goal in meeting the criteria allowing Ukraine to apply for the EU membership in 2023. It sees the European course as an integral part of the process to gain NATO membership, too. In this context, Petro Poroshenko's team has proposed the EU to do a screening of the Ukrainian legislation that needs to be harmonized with that of the EU by 2023. European Solidarity's platform points to the need of a more systemic integration with the EU's internal market, where joining the EU energy and digital single markets are priority tasks. So is approximation with the standards of the Schengen Area and deeper customs cooperation as conditions for improving the investment climate and creating highly-paid jobs in Ukraine.

The Euro-Atlantic Charter can be seen as a more detailed program document of the European Solidarity. Among other things, the Charter entails the implementation of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement, full functioning of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, deeper sectoral integration with the EU, and the use of communication and resource opportunities under the EU's Eastern Partnership policy to exchange expertise and to strengthen cooperation between the six partner-states and the EU.

The political platform of Holos (Voice) a party of the rock-star Svyatoslav Vakarchuk - clearly states that the course towards the EU membership is the foundation of Ukraine foreign policy, what can be found in the section on foreign policy and relations with the EU of their election programme. Ukraine's full integration into the EU research space is a separate point in the section on developing Ukrainian science.

Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) - a political party headed by Iuliia Tymoshenko, pledges effective implementation of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and points out that Ukraine's future is in the united Europe. Ukraine's approximation to the EU in economic, transport and energy spheres are profoundly outlined in its New Economic Course.

The Opposition Platform - For Life! - a spin-off of former President Yanukovich Party of Regions that have an open pro-Russian views, is the only one that does not focus on European integration

in its platform documents. Its representatives insist that European integration runs counter to Ukraine's national economic interests. Vadym Rabinovych, number two in a party list, says that "we should build Europe in Ukraine", while party's leader Yuriy Boyko believes that confirming Ukraine's movement towards the EU in the Constitution was nothing more than political PR.

Eurointegration Prospects in the Post-election Period

The post-election reality overwhelmed both Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his newly-created party that did not expect to end up with the one-party majority in the Parliament. The new political landscape creates a window of opportunities for fast and uncompromised reforms and serious risks of stronger authoritarian trends and concentration of power in one hands.

Servant of the People holds 254 mandates, it will chair 19 out of 23 parliament committees. Its MPs make up the majority in every parliament committee. In the context of potential greenlighting of draft laws proposed by the majority, other political entities in the parliament have little voice.

What prospects or risks does this create for Ukraine's eurointegration track? While the new speaker of the Verkhovna Rada Dmytro Razumkov did not spoke about European integration as his priorities, focused predominantly on the domestic reform agenda, however, many of the planned reforms are a part of Ukraine's commitments under the Association Agreement.

As a positive development should be seen a fact that Ivanna Klymush-Tsyntsadze, previously Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and now an MP with the European Solidarity, was approved as a head of the Parliamentary Committee for Ukraine's Integration with the EU. An experienced politician with a clear understanding of procedures and interinstitutional nuances in the Association Agreement implementation, she can seriously improve the efficiency and productivity of work on respective draft laws. The Committee is already

among the most proactive ones in holding meetings and considering draft laws that are part of the eurointegration track.

A negative development is the relatively small number of committee members where most have no previous experience in harmonizing Ukrainian legislation with the EU requirements.

The political will of the Verkhovna Rada leadership is the only factor that determines the efficiency of Ukraine's approximation to the EU legislation for the Association Agreement implementation purposes. It is important to note in this context that First Vice Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk has mentioned poor quality of eurointegration projects drafted by the previous parliament.

The first step towards effective implementation of the Association Agreement can be amending the Verkhovna Rada Procedures and adopting a mechanism for a fast-track consideration of eurointegration laws. The second step is already proposed by the committee in charge is to make a list of priority draft laws to implement the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and to include these draft laws in the Parliament agenda.

The new leadership of the Verkhovna Rada has proposed to introduce a plan of legislation drafting work including their prioritization. If the plan turns out to include and prioritize eurointegration draft laws, this will signal that President Zelenskyy and his team are serious about Ukraine's integration with the EU.

Obviously, eurointegration cannot progress without proper cooperation between the Parliament and the Government. The new Cabinet of Ministers inspires moderate optimism. Firstly, the newly-elected Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk has assured that the Government's program will remain oriented at the EU and Euro-Atlantic integration. Secondly, the new Government keeps the position of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. Career diplomat Dmytro Kuleba was appointed to this position. He is already actively cooperating with the respective committee at the Verkhovna Rada. One of the solutions to make the work between the Government and the Parliament more effective

could be reliance on the transition book prepared by the Government Office for Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. It contains a list of necessary steps to continue the Association Agreement implementation processes launched earlier.

In this context, we may expect quick re-approval of the list of priority draft laws to be passed by the Verkhovna Rada by the new Parliament and the Government, similar to the Roadmap for Legislative Support of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement Implementation for 2018-2019.

Recommendations

1. It is important to demonstrate a clear position of the parliamentary majority on projects and initiatives for deeper sectoral integration with the EU in the digital single market, customs policy, energy, justice, freedom and security. Also, it is advisable to determine a position of the political parties in the current Verkhovna Rada on whether they plan to submit proposals to update the Association Agreement/DCFTA: opportunities emerge to revise the political part of it in 2019 and the DCFTA part in 2021.
2. The new Parliament and Government should develop and approve a list of priority draft laws to be passed by the Verkhovna Rada, similar to the 2018-2019 Roadmap for Legislative Support of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement Implementation.
3. MPs from the pro-European parties should proactively establish contacts with MPs of the newly elected European Parliament. It is necessary to renew and strengthen the Friends of Ukraine network in the new European Parliament and to create the respective Ukrainian section of this network. Communications can be channeled via cooperation among political parties, or under the framework of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly or the Parliamentary Association Committee under the Association Agreement.
4. It is advisable to continue EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee meetings in Ukrainian regions, given positive experience in this area. This will allow EU representatives to better understand the process of reform implementation on the ground.
5. It is also worth continuing and institutionalizing the work of EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly on joint initiatives of the three partner-states that have signed Association Agreements with the EU. As one of the initiatives that could reinforce its leadership position in the EuroNest PA, the Ukrainian delegation could work to include the parliamentary delegation from Belarus into the PA.
6. It is necessary to resume the work of the Ukraine - Georgia - Moldova Trilateral Interparliamentary Assembly to shape the common agenda on the European level. Ukraine can have a more distinct leadership role in this structure, and joint statements could help promoting Ukraine's proposals on deeper integration and membership in the EU in the EU's agenda.

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